

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 50/93 Harassment/Fear for safety

26 February 1993

HAITI: Monsignor Willy ROMÉLUS, bishop of Jérémie

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Monsignor Willy Romélus, the Roman Catholic bishop of Jérémie, in the Grande-Anse department of Haiti. He was reportedly ill-treated on 25 February 1993 after celebrating mass in the cathedral of Port-au-Prince.

Mgr. Willy Romélus is an outspoken critic of the military backed regime that ousted democratically elected Jean Bertrand Aristide in a coup d'etat on 30 September 1991. On 25 February Mgr. Willy Romélus officiated a funeral mass for hundreds of victims of a recent Haitian ferry boat disaster. The mass, attended by over 2,000 people, turned into an anti-government demonstration. Mgr. Willy Romélus was reportedly attacked and beaten by a group of armed civilians outside the cathedral after the service. According to witnesses, members of the security forces stood by as the bishop was knocked to the ground, repeatedly punched in the face and kicked. His glasses were broken and his clerical sash was ripped.

Several other people attending the funeral mass were also beaten. Mgr. Willy Romélus was reportedly rescued by members of a United Nations delegation who took him to safety in a diplomatic limousine.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mgr. Willy Romélus has been the subject of intimidation for some time. On 24 September 1992, an armed forces sergeant and at least seven other heavily armed men wearing civilian clothes reportedly went to the bishop's residence and threatened him (see UA 301/92 AMR 36/49/92, 29 September 1992). On 19 December 1991 his name appeared on a "death list" of over one hundred names which was broadcast by a clandestine Haitian radio station controlled by the disbanded Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale (VSN), National Security Volunteers, known as "*tonton macoutes*" (see UA 455/91, AMR 36/38/91, 19 December 1991).

Priests in Haiti have been at the forefront of documenting human rights abuses over the years and members of the Catholic clergy, particularly those involved in grass-roots organizations, have been among those hit by the repression that followed the September 1991 coup. At least 16 priests and three nuns have been detained for short periods of time, while many more have been subjected to threats and harassment by the security forces.

Several priests have told an Amnesty International delegation visiting Haiti that they were under heavy surveillance and that church meetings have been forbidden by the authorities. Others reported receiving death threats.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in French, English or in your own language:

- asking that all necessary steps be taken to guarantee the safety of Monsignor Willy Romélus;
- asking for an investigation into the incident in which Monsignor Willy Romélus and others were reportedly attacked by pro-government demonstrators;
- asking that the results of the investigation be made public and that those found responsible be brought to justice;

APPEALS TO

1) Prime Minister:

Marc BAZIN

Premier Ministre

Palais National

Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Telegrams: Premier Ministre BAZIN, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Faxes: + 509 34 1980 / + 509 23 2121

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Minister / Dear Prime Minister

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2) Minister of the Interior and Defence:

M. le Général Carl Michel NICOLAS

Ministre de l'Intérieur

et de la Défense Nationale

Palais des Ministères

Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Interieur NICOLAS, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Telephone: + 509 22 9198 / + 509 22 1090

Telexes: 20515 Dptindn

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

3) Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces:

Monsieur le Général Raoul CEDRAS

Commandant-en-Chef des Forces Armées d'Haïti

Grand Quartier Général des Forces Armées d'Haïti

Rue Geffrard

Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Telegrams: Comandant-en-Chef des Armees d'Haiti Cedras, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Telephone: + 509 22 3935

Telexes: 20391 ggfadh

Faxes: + 509 23 9007 / + 509 23 9407

Salutation: Monsieur le Général / Dear General

4) Commander of the Grande-Anse Military Department

Monsieur le Lieutenant-Colonel

Bélony GROSHOMME

Commandant du Département militaire

de la Grande-Anse

Casernes FAD'H de Jérémie

Jérémie

Département de la Grande-Anse

Haiti

Telegrams: Comandant du Département militaire de la Grande-Anse Groshomme, Département de la Grande-Anse, Haiti

Salutation: Monsieur le Commandant / Dear Commander

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Haïti en Marche (News weekly)

173 N.W. 94 St

Miami

FL 33150, USA

Son Eminence
Monseigneur Willy Romélus
Evêque de Jérémie
Jérémie
Département de la Grande Anse
Haïti

Conférence Episcopale d'Haïti
Angle rues Pignant et Lamarre
Port-au-Prince
Haïti

and to diplomatic representatives of Haiti accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 April 1993.